

Chairman of U.S. Bishops' International Policy Committee Says Textile Industry Groups Have Distorted Trade Debate

WASHINGTON (December 6, 2006)—Bishop Thomas Wenski, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) international policy committee, is urging textile industry lobbying groups to avoid divisive and alarmist rhetoric when criticizing trade preferences for the world's poorest countries.

"Pitting hard-working manufacturers in our country against the poorest of the poor in Haiti and Africa is a disservice to the dignity all workers," Bishop Wenski said. "While civil discussions and candid disagreements over the impact of trade agreements are reasonable conversations to have in a democracy, playing to the fears of anxious workers is irresponsible and reduces the debate over trade agreements to shallow sound-bites."

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the United Methodist Church support the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement (HOPE) Act to help stimulate economic growth and reduce entrenched poverty in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. On December 5, this ecumenical coalition wrote to all members of Congress urging the passage of preferences for Haiti before the 109th Congress adjourns. A copy of the letter is below.

By providing duty-free access to U.S. markets for certain clothes made in Haiti, the modest trade preferences would help rejuvenate the country's devastated apparel industry that has lost some 80,000 jobs. Eighty percent of Haitians live in abject poverty and the per-capita yearly income stands at just \$440.

A study commissioned by the U.S. Agency for International Development¹ found that the HOPE Act would have no adverse impact on manufacturers in the United States.

In fact, Haiti is an important importer of American products ranging from rice and chickens to automobiles and computers. For every dollar sent to Haiti, one dollar and thirty-four cents comes back.

Congress is expected to consider the bill as early as December 6.

"This important legislation is part our moral imperative to care for the least among us, and reflects the deep-rooted humanitarian concerns of the American people," Bishops Wenski said. "It also offers a meaningful path for many vulnerable people in Haiti to become true partners in their own future."

¹ An Assessment of the Potential Impact of the Haitian Economic Recovery and Opportunity Act (Hero)," Carana Corporation for USAID, May 26, 2003

December 5, 2006

Dear Member of Congress:

As leaders of our respective Christian communities, we write to urge passage of trade preferences for Haiti before the 109th Congress adjourns.

Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere, with 80 percent of the population living in abject poverty as a result of decades of suffering in the face of political unrest and social instability. Per-capita yearly income stands at just \$440 and the inflation rate is 20 percent. More than seven in ten people are unemployed, and 55 percent of the population is illiterate. Forty-two percent of children under the age of five are malnourished, and the health-care system is inadequately equipped to address the destabilizing effects of increasing HIV/AIDS rates.

Despite this legacy of poverty, the present moment offers great hope that Haiti is on the path to deeper security for its people and the entire region. President Préval has undertaken bold initiatives for reform that include combating drug transshipment, lawlessness, and violent crime. These initiatives are essential to the future prosperity and security of the Haitian people, particularly when coupled with steps to generate

employment and economic development. Trade preferences, as defined in the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement (HOPE) Act of 2006, will enhance Haiti's efforts toward economic progress.

Provisions within the HOPE Act give Haiti preferential access to the U.S. market, a critical step that will attract investment in Haiti, create jobs and help tackle Haiti's crippling poverty and instability. Stability will not take root in Haiti without economic development and the textile and apparel sector – the segment of the economy that would benefit most from trade preferences – offers the best opportunity for job creation.

Moreover, according to a recent study by the U.S. Agency for International Development, trade preferences would have no adverse impact on U.S. manufacturers. In fact, Haiti is an important importer of American products ranging from rice and chickens to automobiles and computers. For every dollar sent to Haiti, one dollar and thirty-four cents comes back.

As Christians, we confess a faith that sees the power of resurrection and rebirth even in the midst of the most overpowering death and loss. Americans share a special bond of friendship with the Haitian people that stems from our moral obligation to be good neighbors to those in need. Provisions within the HOPE Act offer meaningful economic incentives to help the Haitian people continue along the path of development and peace. We urge you, as Members of Congress, to pass meaningful trade preferences for Haiti before the 109th Congress adjourns.

With prayerful good wishes for your work on behalf of the Haitian people, we remain

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church

The Reverend Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Reverend Felix Ortiz-Cotto, United Church of Christ-Christian Church, Disciples of Christ

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski, Chairman, Committee on International Policy, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Mr. James E. Winkler, General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church

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